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### **INVESTING IN PEOPLE**

**(Health)**

#### **DOH to focus on population control in Armm**

**(Source: SunStar News Online – 4/21/08**

THE Department of Health (DOH) will prioritize the provinces in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in its population control program.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said this after the latest population growth survey released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) indicated that Armm is the region with the highest population growth rate of 5.46 percent, higher than the 2.04 percent average.

According to Duque, if the registered growth rate in Armm would be taken away, the country's population fertility rate would be lower than 2.04 percent or around 1.88 percent.

The provinces comprising the Armm, which according to the health secretary are the poorest provinces in the country, include Sulu, Maguindanao, Tawi-tawi, Basilan and Lanao del Sur.

The 76.50 million total population in May 2000 went up by 15.8 percent, now bringing the total number of Filipinos to 88.57 million.

Duque added that compared to other countries in the Southeast Asia, the Philippine population growth was much higher than Malaysia, which had a 2.1 percent growth rate from 2001 to 2006; Vietnam, 1.4 percent annual population growth rate from 2001-2006; Indonesia, 1.3 percent; and Thailand, 0.8 percent.

On the other hand, he attributed the population growth reduction to the migration of many Filipinos and the awareness of many couples about the benefits of limiting the number of their children.

He also noted that the government will continue to push for natural family planning method.

The US Agency for International Development (Usaid) stopped its free supply of contraceptives such as pills, condom, and injectibles for the Philippines last year.

The pullout of the free supply of contraceptives, Usaid said, is to help the country become "self reliant" and let the local government and private sector take the challenge of controlling the country's population from swelling.

But Duque said they cannot dictate to the local government units (LGUs) what method of family planning to use since it's up to them to decide the appropriate method of family planning that is "medically and legally permissible."  
(MSN/Sunnex)